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THE MOSQUE RISING IN THE PLACE OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON.

A POEM,

TO WHICH A SECOND PRIZE WAS AWARDED.

Gough Adds
Oxon. 8° 122

BY

R. W. HENDERSON,

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE.

OXFORD,
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BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

INVOCATION to Solomon's Temple.—Its building, magnificence, and dedication.—Its subsequent decline and lamentable fall.—The Captivity.—Building of the Second Temple.—Prophecy of Haggai, —fulfilled in the Birth of the Messiah.—Rejection of Christ by the Jews.—Their guilt consummated by His Death.—The Capture of their City by the Romans, and the Destruction of their "holy and beautiful House."—Dirge over the Temple.—A still heavier retribution, as it were, befalls them in the Mohammedan Conquest, and in the profanation of their ruined Sanctuary by the rising of the Mosque.—Oppressed condition of the Jews, and appeal to Christian sympathy.—In all their misery and disgrace, the long-cherished hope of their Messiah, and of the Restoration of their Kingdom, still comforts them. The present Crisis seems to point to some such great event, not far distant.—Conclusion.

THE MOSQUE RISING IN THE PLACE OF THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON.

"Fallen! fallen! fallen! fallen!
Fallen from her high estate!"

SLOWLY, and like a silent, solemn dream,
Meet vision for a Poet's lofty theme,
Arise once more, thou venerable Shrine,
Enthron'd upon the hill that erst was thine,
And let thy primal splendours, faded long,
Begin the prelude of my chequer'd song.
Too soon the harp, now tun'd to hymn thy praise,
Must change its burden to far other lays;
Too soon these echoes of thy early fame
Must thrill with deeper notes of woe and shame.

Hail! ancient Temple! let me see thee now
Shrin'd, as of yore, on fair Moriah's brow,
When, like new star by planet-watchers hail'd,
Serene thou stood'st in magic grace unveil'd.

As deepens flake on flake the fretted snow,
So sprang thy fabric without sound or blow;
So thy broad courts, and blocks of polish'd stone,
And glittering spires in sudden radiance shone;
Towers, pillars, porticoes, and sculpture rare,
All flush'd spontaneous in pure union there.
And brighter yet within, what dazzling blaze
Burst in one flash on the astonish'd gaze!
What gorgeous tracery, what wealth untold
Of native cedar blent with foreign gold!
For this did Tyre put forth her workman craft,
And island ships their costly burdens waft;
For this did Leb'non strip his forests hoar,
And bounteous Ophir empty all her store.
Lo! pond'rous beams from Carmel's stately bowers,
And graceful columns wreath'd with clust'ring flowers;
Light-broider'd network, and the deep grave aisle,
Where shadow might repose, or sunbeam smile;
Rich purple robes, and vessels wrought of gold,
And all the cunning skill of masters old.
Towering aloft the cherubs' pinions broad
Spread their gilt plumage o'er the ark of God,
While spanning all the dark-groin'd roof on high,
Reliev'd the strain upon the glistening eye,
And held it rapt, till vision died away
In strange, vague sense of dread sublimity.

Majestic edifice! no human hand[a]
The faultless mould of thy creation plann'd:
A nobler method, a diviner air,
Spake God Himself thy great Artificer.

And oh! what glory on thy bridal day
(Far, far beyond faint notes of mortal lay)
Shone round thee consecrate, when King's command
Marshall'd in state the princes of the land,
And drawn from far by thy imperial fame,
E'en alien monarchs to thine altar came.
Back roll'd thy massy gates their portals wide,
And oped a pathway to the heaving tide;
From every clime, from every varied race,
Thousands and thousands throng'd the ample space:
White-surpliced priests the ark of heaven bare,
And waved soft incense through the languid air,
While myriad victims shed their life's dark stream[b],
And countless altars flash'd with lambent gleam;—
Then on the silence rose the swell of song,
And broken peal'd the echoing roofs among,
As the long murmur of the bursting wave
Wakes the still sleep of Staffa's pillar'd cave.
Great JAH was pleas'd, and from His heav'nly home
Vouchsaf'd high token to His earthly dome;

[a] 1 Chron. xxviii. 12.

[b] 1 Kings viii. 5. "And king Solomon, and all the congregation that were assembled unto him, were with him before the ark, sacrificing sheep and oxen, that could not be told nor numbered for multitude."

In silent glory, like a mist of dew,
His shrouded Presence stole upon the view:
Hush'd Judah hail'd the soft-diffusing cloud[c],
In suppliant meekness knelt, and bless'd her favouring God.

Such pomp was thine, O House, such pride elate
Nurs'd the bright hopes of thy sublimer state.—
But who shall read without a trickling tear
Thy swift decline, thy sad dishonour'd bier?
In vain thy seers the coming doom foreshow'd,
And guardian-angels fled thy lov'd abode;
Still, steep'd in sin, thy many-monarch'd race[d]
Defied their God, and spurn'd His tender grace.
Led to the prey, Assyrian vultures rush'd:
Proud Salem's life-blood o'er her pavements gush'd;
Her temple, like some goodly cedar fell'd,
Groan'd, totter'd, crash'd,—unpitied and unknell'd.

When widow'd Judah broke her captive chain,
And to her lonely hearth return'd again,
A second time the sacred fabric rose,
And mock'd the malice of its envious foes.

[c] Josephus, Antiq., bk. viii. 4. "There came down a thick cloud and stood there; and spread itself, after a gentle manner, into the temple: such a cloud it was as was diffused and temperate,—not such a rough one as we see full of rain in the winter."

[d] Prov. xxviii. 2. "For the transgression of a land many are the princes thereof."

A second time!—but oh, the difference now!
How changed the aspect of that queenly brow!
How fallen from the ancient House divine,
The pale, wan beauty of the younger Shrine!
So thought that sorrowing group of aged peers,
Whose memory led them back to other years;
Who knew the Temple in its palmier days,
And saw, though setting, its refulgent blaze.
A thought it was to touch a well-spring deep,
And make those grey-hair'd sires lift up their voice and weep.
Mistaken tears! "A new-born Sun shall shed[e]
A brighter glory round the daughter's head,
Brighter than e'en her favour'd mother knew,"—
So cried the prophet blest with prescient view.

Age followed age: the tide of time roll'd on,—
"A Virgin hath conceiv'd and bare a Son!"
Wake, harp, awake! Ye vaulted roofs, prolong
The mighty echoes of the wondrous song!
Break forth, Jerusalem, in triumph rise,
And greet thy God descending from the skies!
Ah! Wilt thou spurn this loud, this last appeal,
And let thy thankless lips cold silence seal?
Wilt thou too, Shrine, disown thy prophet's[f] word,

[e] Haggai ii. 9. "The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of Hosts." [f] Haggai.

And slight the "glory" of thine infant Lord?
When Saba yearns her distant wealth to bring,
Have *ye* no gifts for your low-cradled King?
What! Must ambition court a grander fate,—
An earthly diadem, high regal state,
A conquering flag o'er sea and land unfurl'd,
The vassalage of Rome, the empire of the world?
Proud, foolish Israel! thy lot how blest!
Could humbler thoughts have sooth'd thy haughty breast!
Couldst thou have known, while yet 'twas His to save,
That peace, which lost, made thine a sadder grave!

Ye guardian-spirits of a once-lov'd land,
Let not weak mortal dare, with powerless hand,
To paint the hour when Sion's guilt ran o'er,
And stain'd, thrice stain'd her in a Saviour's gore.
Dark grew the sun, earth shudder'd at the deed,
And from their yawning graves the dead were freed;
That hour, too sad for words, for thoughts too deep,
'Tis yours to mourn, 'tis yours alone to weep.

Nor long delay'd the day of vengeance came,
A day of tears and anguish, sword and flame.
Like dire Avenger of the curse of blood[g],
Relentless Rome the guilty race pursued,

[g] St. Matth. xxvii. 25. "His blood be on us and on our children."

Nor sheath'd her steel, nor stay'd her gory hand,
Till struggling fell that doom'd, that patriot band.

As snake and eagle lock'd in deadly fight[h]
Wheel through the dizzy air their madd'ning flight,
The princely bird now droops, now towers again,
Dyes its fierce beak, and scorns the racking pain!
The writhing snake in frantic agony
Twines its bright coils, and darts its gleaming eye,
Still, as it sickens, rears its crested head,
Stings the strong foe, and falls, stain'd, torn, and dead.
So Rome and Salem warr'd, nor ceas'd their hate,
Till one had conquer'd, one fulfill'd her fate.
Yet even then in that unequal strife
Throbb'd the last quivering pulse of ebbing life,
And Judah nerv'd her for one dying blow
To save her Shrine from the insulting foe.
Hope impotent! Forth flamed the lurid glare,—
Rose the wild shriek of fury and despair,—
One awful crash,—one redder blaze of light,—
Then all was silent, dark, eternal night.

Sleep on now, weary Temple, take thy rest,
Nor wish to ope thine eyes on dawn unblest.

[h] Cf. Iliad, xii. 200; Æneid, vii. 751; Shelley, Revolt of Islam, cant. i. 8.

Thou art at peace, and never more shalt know
The suppliant's homage, or the tyrant's blow.
Let shade of sorrow guard thy voiceless halls,
And mantling ivy deck thy ruin'd walls,
Lovely in death, as some fair lifeless face
Whose marble beauty corpse-strewn flowerets grace.
Let whispering breeze from Olives' balmy steep,
And murmuring Kedron lull thy tranquil sleep,
While angel-voices, haply, thrill thy grove,
And sing soft dirges o'er their blighted love.
Let Judah's maidens haunt thy lonely glade,
And pour their sorrows to the pensive shade;
Let Hebrew mother point thee to her boy,
And tell thy glories with a mournful joy,
Whereat with pride his beating heart shall rise,
And tears of boyish pity dim his eyes;
And when the pilgrim treads thy sacred sod,
And breathes his vespers to the listening God,
Be his sweet calm, a sadden'd heart to feel,
And let warm tear-drops from his eyelids steal.

It may not be. Ah! 'twere a bliss too deep
For thee to know that still, unbroken sleep;
Such slumber were to leave, O Shrine profan'd!
The last most bitter drop in all thy cup undrain'd.

They came, like fiery blast from steppes afar,

To Salem came those desert sons of war;
Fierce men, who mock'd at mercy's gentle glow,
Nor blush'd to trample on a fallen foe;
Well-pleas'd beneath Religion's specious name
To cloak the reeking blade, the ruthless flame,—
And thus, as lightning scathes the prostrate tree,
They wreak'd their wrath, dead Solyma! on thee.

Yet haply there was one, one hallow'd spot,—
"Paynim, avaunt! disturb, pollute it not,
'Tis holy ground, 'twas once Jehovah's fane,
Withdraw thy foot, thine impious hand restrain.
Father! yet once again thy count'nance turn,
And spare, oh spare thy Temple's mould'ring urn."
Too late, too late that agonizing cry
Breaks on the cold deaf ear of God on high;
Judah hath spurn'd the birthright in disdain[i],
And now these bitter tears must flow in vain,
While proudly rear'd upon her Temple's site
Flaunts the pale emblem[k] of the Moslem's rite.

Christian, to whom the wondrous grace of Heaven
That forfeit blessing of the Jew hath given;
Pilgrim, if e'er thy pious steps shall tread
Where thy Lord liv'd for thee, endur'd, and bled;

[i] Cf. Genesis xxvii. 34; Hebrews xii. 17. [k] The Crescent.

If e'er thou climb Mount Olives' sainted way,
Or seek the Garden-shade[l] to weep and pray;
If e'er thou bow in yonder solemn Shrine[m],
Or kiss the site of Calvary divine,—
Though scenes like these, with deeper awe imprest,
Bespeak the sorrow of thy heaving breast,
Yet spare one heart-wrung tear for Sion's woes,
By God forsaken, and oppress'd by foes.

Lorn cast-away! how hath affliction's tide
Roll'd its rude billows o'er her shatter'd pride!
How lies her state so fair, so brave at morn,
At eve a wreck o'erwhelmed by the storm!
No triumphs now attend her queen-like sway,
No monarchs kneel, no vassal realms obey;
Cold is her prophet's tongue, and hush'd her lyre,
Quench'd the last glimmer of her patriot fire.
Her sons forsake her, distant lands to roam,
The world their pilgrimage, no spot their home;
Live but to gold, dead to all sense of shame,
What care have they for Salem's long-lost fame?
Saddest of all, her Temple's stately head,
Laid low in earth, is number'd with the dead.
E'en ruin's self can lend no sheltering gloom
To shield the precincts of that hapless tomb;

[l] Gethsemane. [m] The Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

No hoary pillar rears its friendly sign,
Last lone memorial of the nameless Shrine,
Nor moss-grown arch, nor ivy-mantled wall,
One lingering trace of grandeur can recall;
But there, there o'er the violated grave,
The proud usurpers' scornful banners wave,
There towers the Mosque, there Pagan altars rise,
And there the False-Ones keep their heathen sacrifice.

Oh Salem! Salem! can no ray illume
Thy sunless solitude, thy death-like gloom?
Shines there no star in all the darken'd sky
To cheer thy heart, and lift thy drooping eye?
Yes; on the blackest hour of dismal night
Hope pours the lustre of her silv'ry light,
And Judah still, though crush'd 'neath tyrant sway,
Hails the glad beam, and wipes her tears away.
Sweet Hope! lone flower in sorrow's thorny crown,
What power hast thou to smoothe misfortune's frown,
To ease the chain of long, long captive years,
And turn to sweet the bitter bread of tears!
Like the fresh root in mummy's crumbling hand[n],
Thou liv'st undying 'mid a lifeless land,
Still blooming—still to bloom, when Judah's Vine

[n] A living root was lately found by Lord Lindsay, clasped in the mouldering hand of a mummy. It grew up, when planted, into a beautiful dahlia.